

Walter J. Bracken STEAM Academy
Las Vegas, Nevada
Clark County School District



It Happened in Vegas: Notes from a School Turnaround

Alan Diskin, Junior Achievement President: How has Bracken evolved from its one star stage to a five star stage? That's simple. That is a collective team approach.

Katie Decker, Principal: One of the things that was most important was everybody working together and being on the same page. After learning about the PLC communities, we were able to push that concept forward. Teachers needed to have the same results. They needed to have the same assessments, the same grade books. They don't teach the same way because everybody is an individual and they are going to have their own style and they should be allowed to have the freedom to do that but really having them collaborate as a team you've got way better ideas being generated.

Christine Herbert, Theme Coordinator: The teachers are planning together, they're planning what they are going to be teaching when, how it will be assessed, and then that's brought back to our student improvement team where we make decisions as a school-wide basis. The teachers really have a buy-in and say during this process. If they think a certain curriculum would be best for our students, they present the research behind and we make a decision with all the staff instead of one person saying this is what you will teach. And that's huge.

Connie Verchick, Technology Teacher the school itself has changed. I've seen a dirt, grassy area by the 1st grade and now it's a magical, musical, fairy garden. Kids are so excited when they get to eat their lunch out there in special locations. Classes go out there we didn't even have the science labs. So now we have the physical science lab, the live science and the earth science lab.

Katie Decker, Principal: Then the best thing was that we got was Las Vegas Rotary Club, the Lanni family, all these business and community partners who've poured in support to these children to help them be successful and really innovative projects and transformations of the environment, those are the things that have completely changed the landscape of our community, of our

neighborhood, the city support. I could list our partners but really it's a huge list and there's new partners all of the time and having that positive energy I think that is a catalyst for success.

Steve Linder, Las Vegas Rotary Club: She wants education to be everywhere and she takes advantage of the building and the layout. Every pole out there in the overhangs has got writing on it;

it's got sayings, it's got formulas. Around the school you can see it in the physical plant where she's created gardens, an amphitheater, all the sidewalks are painted with the states, the state capitols, everywhere you look there is something. There is a big map of the United States hanging up on the playground. There are so many different avenues that teachers can use to educate the kids. It's just phenomenal, walking around. The teachers can take kids out to the amphitheater, they can walk the sidewalks and learn the state capitols, look at the chess board that's been installed out there in one of the grass areas and learn about the game of chess. I mean, how many kids in elementary school get to learn stuff like that?

Jeremy Hauser, Associate Superintendent: I think Bracken is constantly working toward aligning all their academic efforts, all their projects, all their initiatives toward academic achievement. You'll see on the bulletin boards out in the hallways where students are in their progression towards the school's academic goals. You see in classrooms examples of high quality work, you see the standards of what they are looking for out of those work posted. Even as we looked at the garden this morning you see the labels on all the plants, some additional information on what those plants are used and how they are integrated back in the curriculum. There is not a discussion that goes on here that is not wrapped up back into the academic program of the school.

I think we can learn from Bracken, districts and schools, I think the restraints we put on ourselves as educators are much looser than we believe they are ourselves. So I think that school leaders, teachers, if they come up with unique solutions to problems, that in most case you are able to do those within the system. Because a lot of times we believe you can't do them or somebody is going to criticize them, or the fear of failure, but in most cases, if there is a clear vision behind the actions you want to take, the bureaucracy is going to help you do them.